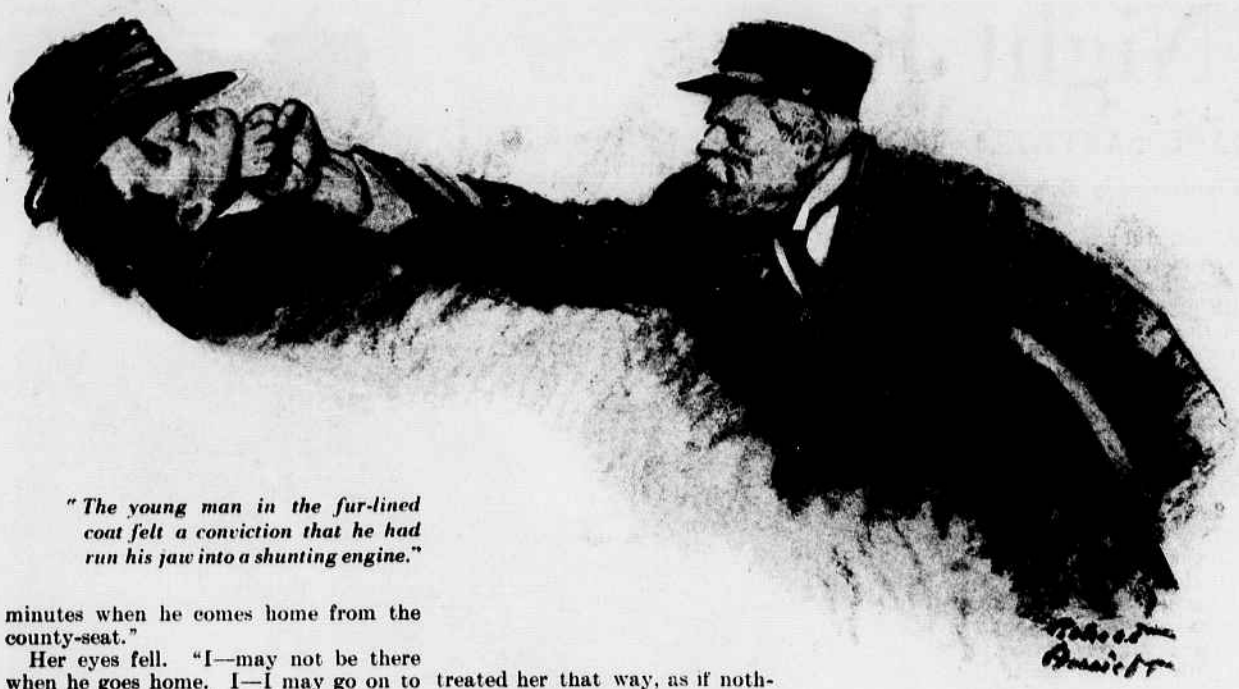

"The young man in the fur-lined coat felt a conviction that he had run his jaw into a shunting engine."

minutes when he comes home from the county-seat."

Her eyes fell. "I—may not be there when he goes home. I—I may go on to Harrisburg to-night!"

A queer silence fell between them.

"Plague take the snow!" the conductor exclaimed irritably. "Ought to have made the Mead's Fork bridge five minutes ago. Well—"

He turned away, but not before he had seen a curious change come over the girl. Her slender body stiffened, the pupils of her eyes dilated until they made her eyes almost black. A wild-rose flush spread over her delicate face.

"Are we almost at Mead's Fork?" she asked.

"Six minutes," replied the conductor, bustling away down the aisle.

AT Mead's Fork only three passengers boarded the train. They were all men. Two of them settled down in the smoker and the third went back to the ladies' coach. Presently the conductor, punch in hand, opened the door. He took in the length of the car in one practised glance. Over the back of the seat in front of the girl was a fur-lined overcoat. The owner of this garment was sitting beside the girl. Their faces were turned toward each other, the girl's drooping a little, but tremulous, happy; the man's excited, triumphant. The conductor knew that their hands were clasped.

He came down the aisle very slowly. His face, seamed, grimly placid, showed no sign; but his mind was working rapidly, darting from picture to picture in the long rows of faces that lined the walls of his trained memory. Before he reached the girl's seat he had definitely placed the owner of the fur-lined overcoat. He had tagged and catalogued the girl's companion, and he understood now the nature of the disaster toward which the Judge's little granddaughter was speeding.

When the conductor went back to the front seat in the smoker he walked like an old man. As he spread out his tickets on the seat in front of him his hands trembled. He had already attended to this task, but he wanted to be alone—he wanted to think.

He sat hunched over, his head turned sidewise, staring at the snow that sifted in under the loose window-frame. He found it was hard to think. Inconsequent thoughts, memories, and emotions had their way with him. He fell to thinking how he had always longed for a daughter. Sons he had, and they had turned out well; but to have for his own a little girl child—that had always seemed to him the supreme miracle-touch of life. That was the one possession of the rich old Judge he had coveted—his little girl. She had always from her babyhood seemed so mysteriously different from other children, so like a little princess, with her big, dreamy, blue-gray eyes, her delicate perfection of detail, her dainty gowns, her primrose fluff of hair. Her grandmother and the Judge had always treated her that way, as if nothing material was too good for her, and nothing human quite good enough!

The engineer whistling for the next station aroused him. When the train slowed down, he swung himself off into the slush of the platform so feebly that the trainmen reflected with some complacence that the old man was about due for retirement and a pension.

As the train started on again, the conductor followed a woman and two sleepy children into the ladies' coach. As if very busy with affairs in the coach behind, he passed Lois and the man beside her without an apparent glance. But he missed nothing of their constraint. The girl looked proudly and defiantly straight ahead; but the man avoided the conductor's possible glance with the effect of a swagger. A high color burned in Lois's cheeks; but her eyes looked as if she had cried a little between the two stations.

The conductor completed his tour of the train and went back to the smoker. This time he did not sit down, but went out to the platform of the car. Across and back, across and back, like a captain pacing his bridge, he tramped, his knees giving to the bumping of the train. He was gnawing a corner of his iron-gray mustache, and slowly a mighty anger was mounting in his blood. As a man, he wanted to stride back to the car behind, pick up a certain one of his passengers, and throw him out into the snowy night. But as a conductor—whose job is to get his passengers to their destination, not to censor their moral conduct—he could not do it, not even though he knew what he knew about the young man in the fur-lined coat, not even though he had to stand by and see the loveliest thing in his life being impelled to its own destruction.

What, then, could he do? He looked at his watch, craned his neck, and took an observation from the whirling night. In an hour and ten minutes they should make the Junction. Between their arrival and the departure of the Harrisburg night express would be about half an hour. He had, then, a little more than an hour and a half in which to do what he could. A few minutes later, as the train slowed down at the next station, the conductor dropped off and made for the telegraph station.

"Jake, what time does Number 2 leave Cameron Center for the Junction?" he inquired.

The telegraph operator looked up at the clock. "She'll pull out o' there in thirty-two minutes, Al."

"Thought so!" The conductor bent over a little and lowered his voice. "Want you to send this right off. Want an answer at Elk Run. Ready?"

"Fire away," said Jake; and the conductor began to dictate a message to Judge Fitzjames Knox, Hotel Cameron, Cameron Center, Pennsylvania. When he had finished he scratched a furrow through his thick iron-gray hair. "Now, take another to Bob Pierce:

"Hold Number 2 ten minutes for Judge Knox if necessary. AL JACKSON."

Then the conductor straightened up, with a grim smile.

"Exceeding authority, mebbe! Got to be done! Got to be done!"

The conductor climbed back on to his train, glancing as he did so into the ladies' coach. Judge Knox's granddaughter sat crowded a little into the corner of the seat by the ardent attitude of her companion; but her young face was lifted toward his with a tremulous radiance, a half frightened happiness that made the conductor clench his hands.

"Going to hurt the little girl like hell!" he thought miserably. "But there don't seem to be any other way."

CAMERON JUNCTION is composed mainly of railroad station, freight-house, signal-tower, water-tank, little rusty-red tool-houses, and a deplorable railroad hotel. To-night, when the conductor's train pulled in, all these were like wedding cakes, frosted white with snow. This was the end of the conductor's run. Usually he dropped off his train with a subconscious sigh of relief; but to-night every nerve in his body was strung taut. As quickly as he could he disposed of his official affairs.

He was behind the ticket-seller's partition when the man in the fur-lined coat bought a ticket and made a Pullman reservation to Harrisburg. A moment later the girl's voice, with its young diffidence, asked for a ticket to the same place and a Pullman reservation. After that the conductor, glancing slantwise through the wicket, saw the two of them sitting together in the dimly lighted waiting-room. They were not talking now. The girl's head drooped until the brim of her hat hid her face; the man held an unlighted cigarette in the corner of his mouth, and his long-lashed dark eyes, set too close to his handsome, curving nose, glanced here and there and were never still. Now and then he moistened his lips with his tongue, or looked at his watch.

The conductor went out on the snowy platform. He was supposed to be on his way to the hotel for his night's rest. The station-master called good night to him, and for the first time received no answer.

"Old Al's gettin' a little deef," he observed to the telegraph operator.

But old Al's ears were keen enough. He was straining them for the sound of Number 2, whistling for the crossing below the Junction. A spur of the main road ran from Cameron Center to the Junction, a distance of about ten miles; and over this road Number 2 should now be rounding the last curve. But the empty rails stretched away through a valley that lay in a blue-white silence. The conductor felt in his pocket nervously. A yellow slip of paper there informed him that the Judge would catch this train. So that was all right! But what if, as frequently happened, Number 2 should lose half an hour on the bad up-grade? She was a spoilt train, having the road to herself so much of the time; and in bad weather she had been known to cough and lie down with the excuse of a mere two-inch drift. At these times the haughty Harrisburg Express refused to wait for her humble sister beyond a limited number of minutes. What if to-night should be one of these times?

The conductor muttered under his breath one of his infrequent oaths, and his hands went clammy.

"I couldn't do it," he groaned. "If the Judge don't get here—oh, Lord! it's no job for me!"

Presently, down in the yards, began a shunting of cars, lights waving, a warning whistle. The Harrisburg train was being backed up to the station. The conductor took out his watch. Three minutes and the Harrisburg train would be called, the passengers would go aboard. Five minutes more and she would be due to pull out—say fifteen minutes if she waited for Number 2.

A perspiration broke out on the conductor's body. He walked to the far edge of the platform, where he could command a mile of the valley. Not a light, not a sound. Then, for the first time, the conductor had a sharp picture of how the Judge was going to feel when Number 2 got in. In the telegram the Judge had merely been urged to come up to the Junction on personal business extremely important to himself. When the conductor dictated that wire he had thought of himself as meeting the Judge and somehow breaking the shock of the affair for him—of somehow getting between the Judge and his granddaughter and easing the situation, if it could be eased. But now there was going to be no time. He saw himself hustling the Judge into that Pullman with one minute in which to shatter his friend's world into fragments. He visualized that encounter between the Judge and his granddaughter—the punctilious, honorable, proud old man, and the terrified girl, with half a dozen looking on, and the Pullman car for background.

"By gad, no!" he exclaimed. "Wouldn't do! Wouldn't do!"

He cast one last glance down the sleeping valley. Then, turning, he walked quickly toward the door of the waiting-room. Just as he reached it the Harrisburg train moved slowly past him, being shunted into position. As if the sound drew him forth, the man in the fur-lined overcoat opened the door and stepped on to the platform. The conductor went up to him briskly.

"Want to speak to you a minute, Gunter," he said.

IN the act of lighting his cigarette the man started and half turned, cupping the lighted match with his hands.

"Your mistake, I guess," he returned. "Name's not Gunter."

"Mebbe not now. Used to be." The conductor glanced at the window of the waiting-room and jerked a thumb back over his shoulder. "Come up here a ways."

For an instant Gunter hesitated. Then he lighted his cigarette with hands that were not quite steady, and with a swagger followed the older man.

"I gotta take this train. What do you want?"

The conductor did not reply until both of them had rounded the corner of the station and stepped into the shadow of the freight-house. Then he turned upon the younger man. There was the authority of thirty-two years of power in his voice.

"I want you to go on to Harrisburg—without that girl."

Gunter gave a little snarling laugh.

"Oh, ho! that's the game, is it? Well, let me inform you, Mister Fix-it, that girl's over eighteen. She's going of her own